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ABSTRACT

Adaptations, accommodations, and creative use of alternative approaches can make a difference in the success or failure of many college students, particularly those with disabilities. Gonzaga University (Washington) has implemented a holistic admissions process that has resulted in higher completion rates and the recruitment of more students from underrepresented groups. A manual is given to preservice teachers advising them of their rights and responsibilities and informing them of the monitoring processes used. Faculty are notified each semester of accommodations that preservice teachers with disabilities need to be successful. The semester before student teaching, prospective candidates attend a meeting explaining application procedures and general information about the upcoming experience. Just prior to student teaching, an orientation meeting is held. During student teaching, a university supervisor assigned to each student teacher observes the preservice teacher and acts as a liaison between the school and university. Student teachers attend several seminars during student teaching. A remediation plan is developed for those who have difficulty, and if the student teacher cannot meet the competencies of the plan, the experience is terminated. Those students get a second chance the following semester. On completion of student teaching, a review board discusses the final evaluation and recommends teacher certification. The experiences of two preservice teachers with disabilities are described to show how extra care and attention to individual needs can foster success in situations that once were considered impossible or unrealistic. (TD)

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# TWO PRESERVICE TEACHERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND THEIR RIGHTS: WHAT IF THEIR TEACHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCES HAD GONE AWRY?

As we stand on the threshold of a new millennium in teacher education and approach an era in which the demand for teachers is increasing, we must be concerned about not only the number of teachers we are producing, but also the quality of those teachers. What factors help create a positive and successful experience for preservice teachers? What if the preservice experience goes awry? An even more daunting question, "What if the preservice teacher is one with a disability?"

To respond to these questions we must be clear about our own preservice programs and the mission of that program. We must identify ways to more holistically assess the skills of our preservice teachers and to go beyond the "paper screening" that we have relied on in the past. By doing so, we can better identify prospective teachers from all cultural/racial/ethnic and/or underrepresented groups, even those who might not have been totally successful as undergraduates in the traditional academic sense due to cultural, linguistic, and/or disability-related differences. The challenge is to insure that all preservice teachers have an opportunity to achieve and have equal access to learning. We must find a way to attract and retain a wider scope of prospective teachers for tomorrow's children in both general and special education who are prepared for rural, urban, and inner city communities.

At Gonzaga University, we began with a model first developed at the University of Redlands and then we revamped it to meet our particular needs. We wanted to find a way to screen out program applicants who showed little potential for success in our program and to get to know the skills and needs of our prospective students. We also wanted to introduce the key themes of our program so preservice teachers would know up front what our program emphasizes and what we value as professionals. In particular, we wanted to introduce the concept of reflective thinking, the idea that teaching is an interpersonal and professional act, the idea of the value of developing conflict resolution skills, and the philosophy we share in our belief in the value of multiple perspectives and ways of doing. We also wanted to introduce preservice teachers to the importance of the development of their professional skills, including humor, self-knowledge, resiliency factors, collaboration, respect for the field of education, how to think on their feet, and how to collaborate. We based our model on the literature on reflective thinking (Posner was our true base), on the literature about adult learners, on the teacher induction literature, and on surveys completed by the Washington State Professional Education Advisory Board about the skills needed by beginning teachers.

We decided to structure the Lab as a Saturday morning, four-hour session with a variety of activities. We would begin with a welcome and an introduction from the Associate Dean, introducing the faculty, and explaining the rationale for the Lab. We would then discuss advising, state regulations, and distribute some of the paperwork we are required to file. We decided we wanted to teach a new skill in the Lab and decided to investigate various instruments we might use during the Lab. We considered many, including the Stress Test (Muller and Smith), the Survey on Teaching Roles, The Keirsey Temperament Sorter, the How Do You Handle Conflict? Test (Allyn and Bacon), the Learning Style Inventory (Silver and Hanson), and the Risk-Taking Behavior Questionnaire. We finally chose the True Colors materials (True Colors Communications Group, 1990) which are based on Jungian theory and are somewhat related to the Meyers-Briggs test. The True Colors materials help individuals (children

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and/or adults) identify four basic personality types; the materials include suggested classroom activities and videos.

The products we take away from the Lab are the state-required forms, the faculty observers' notes from the leaderless group discussion, and the reflective writing sample. The Associate Dean then reviews all the materials, meets with preservice teachers who were identified as potentially problematic, and files the materials in their departmental file.

To date, approximately 550 Gonzaga preservice teachers have completed the process. Since we initiated this process, not one preservice teacher has been dropped from the program after being admitted. We are convinced that in the cases of preservice teachers we have not admitted that our collective judgments were justified. We believe that our teacher preparation program has been strengthened by more careful attention to the admissions process because we are able to use the insights gained during the assessment as diagnostic information to better meet individual student's needs. This project has enabled us to be much more clear with preservice teachers about the ideas and values embedded in our program, including our commitment to cross-cultural teaching, our belief in the necessity of effective interpersonal skills, and our commitment to diversity. We have also been able to recruit more students from under-represented groups because of our move to a more holistic admissions process.

We developed a Fair Process Manual to apprise preservice teachers of their rights and responsibilities and to make them aware of the monitoring processes we would be using to assess their progress in the teacher education program. This document was drafted by the various directors of programs within the School of Education and then was rewritten to correct for style. The document was then sent to our Academic Vice President and to the university's corporate counsel for an extensive review. We made some changes and then published the document; it has been revised since our administrative restructuring to reflect current job titles and processes. The Fair Process Manual is distributed to all incoming preservice teachers each semester. We also developed a receipt form which preservice teachers sign to acknowledge that they received the Manual and promise to read it; preservice teachers receive a copy of that form and the original is filed in their certification file. We use a system we call "Yellow Lights" in which our faculty create anecdotal records of any incidents which caused them concern. We can then track our preservice teachers' progress and meet with them to discuss our concerns. Preservice teachers who have self-disclosed their disabilities work with our Student Disabilities Services center and faculty are notified each semester of any preservice teachers needing accommodations in order to be successful.

During the second week of the semester prior to the student teaching semester, prospective candidates must attend the Application to Student Teach meeting. This is an intensive meeting with the Director of Student Teaching, Director of Field Experience, and Certification Officer each presenting procedures for the application process. The meeting begins with an introduction by the Director of Student Teaching regarding student teaching and general information about the upcoming experience. The Director of Field Experience helps facilitate the creation of an information packet that will be given to prospective cooperating teachers. The Certification Officer takes care of the FBI/WSP process, Character and Fitness forms, and endorsement concerns.

Preservice teachers are expected to possess a 3.0 g.p.a. in their major, a 3.0 g.p.a. in the professional education courses, a 2.5 g.p.a. overall, and acceptable standardized test scores. The preservice teacher may petition to student teach following steps in our Fair Process Manual if the preservice teacher does not possess the acceptable g.p.a. Preservice teachers are expected to complete their courses in the teacher education program prior to student teaching. This coursework is closely monitored by the Director of Student Teaching. In addition, preservice teachers are expected to obtain two recommendations from their academic advisor along with a recommendation from a person who has information about their potential as a prospective student teacher. Faculty in the teacher education program give input on a Faculty Review form about the skills and abilities of

each student teacher candidate. The Director of Student Teaching then locates placements for the prospective student teachers within a 20-mile radius of the university.

The preservice teachers then begin preparation for the semester in which they will student teach. An orientation meeting is held for all student teachers just prior to beginning their 16-week student teaching experience. During the student teaching experience students work closely with their cooperating teachers. Each student teacher is assigned a university supervisor. The supervisors observe the preservice teacher a minimum of ten visitations during the course of the semester. In addition, the university supervisor meets with the cooperating teacher and designated school administrator checking on how things are going for the student teacher. The university supervisors and Director of Student Teaching communicate on a weekly basis about the progress of each student teacher. The university supervisor acts as a liaison between the school and university.

If at any point during the semester a student teacher is having difficulty, the Director of Student Teaching is immediately contacted. A Remediation Plan may be implemented at this point based on input from the cooperating teacher, building administrator, university supervisor, and Director of Student Teaching. If the student teacher cannot meet the competencies outlined in the Plan, then the student teaching experience is terminated. Further help may be given to the student with a second chance given to the student in another site, usually the following semester.

Student teachers attend several seminars in conjunction with student teaching for debriefing, sharing of new ideas, and preparation of a Career Placement Portfolio. At the end of student teaching a Review Board is held to discuss the final evaluation and recommend for teacher certification. A celebration concludes the student teaching experience with congratulatory remarks for student teachers and thank yous for cooperating teachers and university supervisors.

As we look at our process for teacher candidates, every opportunity is given to accommodate students who may be from an underrepresented group, specifically disability-related differences. Gonzaga University has in place provisions for accommodations based on Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, Title III.

During the late 1980s colleges experienced a dramatic increase in the number of students with disabilities (Vogel, S. & Adelman, P., 1993). The increase is due in part to the increase in litigation and awareness of the legal requirements with respect to college students with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) is the prime legislative extension of Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The ADA prohibits private employers, state and local governments, employment agencies and labor unions from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities. A student with a disability is an individual who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the job or role in question. A college is required to make an accommodation for the person with a disability if it would not impose an undue hardship on the operation of the institution. Undue hardship is defined as an action requiring significant difficulty or expense when considered in light of such factors as the size, financial resources, and nature or structure of the organization.

Since Gonzaga University is a private institution, the requirements of ADA that apply fall under Title III. Title III prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in "places of public accommodation" by private institutions. The ADA, under Title III, "mandates that a provider of goods and services make reasonable modifications to its rules, practices, and policies to provide goods and services to people with disabilities, unless the modification would fundamentally alter the nature of the goods or services" (Goldberg, D. & Goldberg, M., 1993, p. 36). Disabilities Support Services personnel are on hand at Gonzaga University to help faculty and students understand and follow the mandates. A handbook for faculty is available that discusses the philosophical issues and practical challenges in educating persons with disabilities. Not all students with disabilities choose to identify themselves and seek services through the Student Disabilities Services center.

Increasingly, students with disabilities have entered our teacher education program. As we accept each of these students our first response is, "Are we providing equal access to our program?" The next response is whether the student has asked for accommodations and, if so, what accommodations would be necessary. With each case we kept the following four points in mind based on court decisions that make it clear that request for accommodation need not be provided under the following circumstances: (a) the student is not qualified for the course/experience; (b) the accommodation would result in a fundamental alteration of the program; (c) the institution is being asked to address a personal need; or (d) the accommodation would impose an undue financial or administrative burden (Robinson, W., 1996, p.4).

Although several of the recent preservice teacher graduates represent the group of students with disabilities, we have selected two preservice teachers to discuss in greater depth who needed significant accommodations. We believe both preservice teachers were successful because of the attention given to the most appropriate accommodations based on their needs. Throughout their teacher preparation, questions about accommodations were addressed and decisions were based on whether we were considering an accommodation or really a modification of the program. We were concerned about equal access to the teacher education program, not modification.

We would like to share the stories of these two preservice teachers, one who is deaf and the other with a learning disability. (Note: we changed the names in order to protect their privacy.)

Patricia: Patricia was an undergraduate student majoring in special education. She was deaf and aspired to become a teacher for deaf preschool children. Since all our students are required to earn certification in general education in addition to special education, Patricia needed to complete all our general education courses and the two in-school placements prior to placement in student teaching. The university provided interpreters to accompany her to classes; the instructors agreed to meet her needs by sharing audio-visual materials with the interpreters ahead of time, and our Director of Field Experiences made careful arrangements for her in school placements (to which the interpreters accompanied Patricia). This was the first time some of our faculty had worked with interpreters and so there was some adjusting and learning about how to best deliver instruction to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom. At the time student teaching began, we were faced with additional challenges. Patricia was unmarried and pregnant.

Patricia received accommodations throughout the application process to student teach and throughout her student teaching experience. Based on certification requirements, it was necessary for Patricia to student teach in a general education classroom. She was provided an interpreter from the university throughout the application process with two interpreters during student teaching. Particular care was taken in selecting a student teaching site. With help from school district personnel, a school with some experience with deaf and hard of hearing children was identified. In this way, we hoped that faculty would be more open to a person who was deaf. The selected cooperating teacher was one with years of teaching experience, had worked with our student teaching program in the past, and was open to a student teacher who was deaf. Then a university supervisor was selected; one who was also open to the situation, who had a number of years of administrative experience, and familiarity with the district policies and procedures. The university supervisor spent extra time working with the cooperating teacher ensuring the student teaching experience was a positive one and that Patricia could in fact teach. Patricia performed well as a student teacher and was able to overcome any obstacles that came her way.

Why was Patricia's university experience successful? Patricia was provided equal access to her education at Gonzaga University. She connected with the Coordinator of Disabilities Support Services who, in turn,, coordinated the schedules of interpreters throughout the teacher education program for Patricia. Without the services of the interpreters, Patricia could not access information in her classes or student teach. The University provided this service throughout and including student teaching. The Associate Dean was aware of Patricia's needs and was instrumental in "educating" faculty prior to her entrance into class and maintaining contact with those faculty involved in Patricia's coursework. When it was time to move through the student teaching process,

the Director of Student Teaching became actively involved. The student teaching site, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor were hand picked to ensure acceptance and a willingness to work with Patricia. A meeting to get acquainted took place the semester prior to student teaching that included Patricia, the cooperating teacher, principal of the school, university supervisor, two interpreters, and the Director of Student Teaching. We reviewed the expectations of Patricia as a student teacher (the same expectations for all student teachers) and discussed what accommodations might be necessary. Role playing and "what if" questions were discussed. It appeared the key to success would be with the interpreters in the class full time. The greatest initial challenge was to ensure that the interpreters only signed and did not get involved with the discipline or instruction of the children. Once past that hurdle, the student teaching fell into place just as it typically does for most student teachers. Patricia has learned to adapt well to her surroundings and takes each learning situation on as a personal challenge that she will overcome.

Bob: Bob was an undergraduate student majoring in physical education and with a minor in health. Bob was diagnosed with a learning disability accompanied with a physical disability involving tics early in his college career. He wanted to become a secondary physical education/health teacher, returning to his home state of California. Bob had difficulty focusing on his coursework. He worked best in structured settings with little ambiguity. When frustrated, Bob would react impulsively and get upset. His academic advisor worked closely with him to provide structure, continuity, and ensure that he met class deadlines. Bob moved successfully through the teacher education program. When it was time to student teach, the academic advisor and director of student teaching met the semester prior to student teaching and coordinated his field experience placement with the student teaching placement. We looked for continuity and wanted to keep Bob with the same cooperating teachers. The academic advisor became the university supervisor for Bob, again to maintain continuity and the fact that she had worked with Bob for several years and understood the accommodations he might need. During student teaching, Bob taught physical education and health. He was faced with an atypical challenge in that the school's gym was under construction that impacted the instruction. This necessitated Bob to become more flexible with his physical education instruction. The health class was very structured, to Bob's liking. He felt most comfortable in the structured setting. The staff and administration at Bob's high school student teaching site provide extra mentoring for all the student teachers, which particularly was beneficial to Bob. He, as well as the other student teachers in the school, were treated as professionals by the administration. They were asked, "You are in charge, what would you do in this situation?" This acceptance as a professional positively impacted Bob and his performance as a student teacher.

Why was Bob's university experience successful? Bob received some accommodation in his coursework with extra time spent in conference with his academic advisor, who was also one of the instructors for several of his courses. The academic advisor continued to work with Bob as the supervisor throughout the student teaching experience. The school site for student teaching was selected based on Bob's need and where we thought he would be the most successful. For many students with a learning disability such as Bob, it can be more difficult to be accepted by others. Invisible disabilities appear to be more difficult to tolerate—the disability is less obvious or understood. As indicated in a recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, a debate continues as to whether a learning disability may even exist for some of the college students diagnosed as such. In working with Bob, it was important for faculty to understand and accept his strengths and the areas that were most challenging to him. For most of his teacher preparation program little accommodation was necessary other than having one person regularly meet with him and consistently follow him through the program to ensure details of paperwork and assignments were completed in a timely manner. In Bob's case, the parents were also closely monitoring Bob's progress through the teacher preparation program with Bob and the parents meeting on several occasions with the academic advisor.

With extra care and attention to the individual needs of every persevice teacher, it is possible to "expand the envelope"-to consider situations that once were considered impossible or unrealistic. Providing a holistic teacher education program that includes several steps along the way to screen and assist preservice teachers creates an environment for success. Adaptations, accommodations or simply creatively looking at alternative

approaches can make a difference in the success or failure of many students, particularly those with disabilities. We continue to maintain the integrity of our teacher education program holding high expectations of our preservice teachers as well as understanding that some of the preservice teachers might need accommodations to gain equal access to the program.

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